Office of River Protection

PRESS RELEASE

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WASTE PUMPING BEGINS ON FIRST HANFORD TANK TARGETED FOR CLOSURE

Crews have begun removing radioactive waste from Tank C-106, one of the oldest waste tanks at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington and the first Hanford tank selected for closure.

It is a cleanup endeavor that is being watched closely by the Department of Energy and the agencies that regulate Hanford cleanup.

"A key to moving forward with cleaning up and closing Hanford tanks is to go through the waste retrieval experience on the first tank," said Delmar Noyes, Tank Farms Projects Director for DOE's Office of River Protection. "As we gain that experience, we can begin delivering on our commitment to close the Hanford tanks and to reduce the potential threat to our workers, the environment, and the public."

Most of the liquid waste—approximately 18,000 gallons—was pumped out of the tank yesterday. Now, the DOE Office of River Protection and cleanup contractor CH2M HILL Hanford Group will prepare to remove the last 10,000 gallons of thick sludge waste in the tank.

C-106 was built in 1943, one of the first of 177 large underground tanks constructed at Hanford over the decades to store a total of 53 million gallons of radioactive and hazardous waste. A misrouted transfer of strontium waste from a Hanford processing facility in the 1970s deposited waste inside C-106 that was so hot that the waste boiled.

The heat problem put the 530,000-gallon tank on a congressional watch list of 60 dangerous Hanford waste tanks. In the late 1990s, most of the waste in C-106—about 186,000 gallons containing 4.4 million curies of radioactivity—was transferred to another tank to solve the high-heat problem.

"This is truly an example of how we have changed the way we are doing business to meet the DOE's accelerated cleanup goals," said Ryan Dodd, Vice President of Closure Project for DOE cleanup contractor CH2M HILL Hanford Group, Inc. "We prepared this tank for removing the waste and started the pumping operations safely, in less time, and for less money than similar projects in the past."

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The retrieval of the Tank C-106 waste and the tank's closure are being carried out under an Accelerated Closure Demonstration agreement with Hanford's regulators. The experience and information gained as waste is removed from C-106 will help guide decisions by DOE, CH2M HILL, and Hanford's regulatory agencies and stakeholders on the appropriate regulatory and technical pathway for closing the rest of Hanford's tanks.

"The next steps for cleaning up this tank include adding a light acid to dissolve the sludge waste, and pumping the rest of the waste out," said Dodd. "A key part of our preparation for the sludge waste removal was completed in March with the replacement of a 50-year-old pump that had become stuck after decades of heating and cooling cycles in the tank."

According to the Tri-Party Agreement, all of the waste in C-106 must be retrieved by November 2003. The pathway for closure and other tank cleanup decisions will be captured in the form of an Environmental Impact Statement, which would support a Record of Decision by DOE in April 2004. Accelerated cleanup plans call for closing up to 40 of Hanford's older single-shell tanks by October 2006.

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